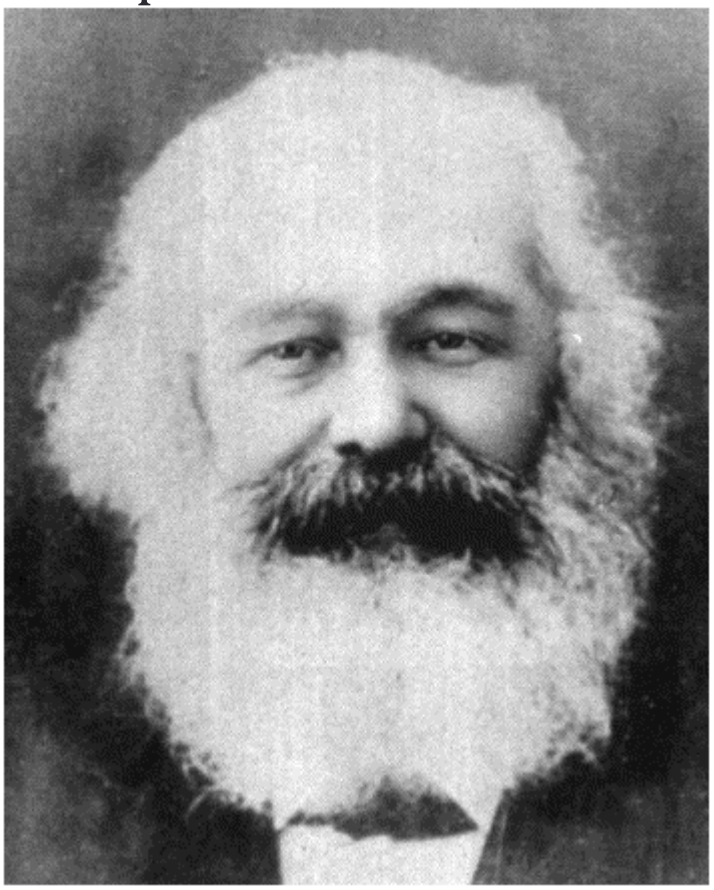
# A Contribution to the Critique of Marx - John Crump



This essay was published in pamphlet form in February 1976. It was published jointly by Social Revolution and Solidarity.

A number of us who went on to form Subversion were members of Social Revolution at the time. It marked our first attempts to get away from hanging on every word of Karl Marx's and to try to understand why his works spawned such a diverse variety of political thought - ranging from communism to state capitalism. It also marked the beginning of the end for Social Revolution, for shortly afterwards we were to merge with Solidarity!

In scanning this document for the web, I have left out a number of the footnotes. These provide details of where to find the various quotes from Marx and Lenin. Mostly they come from the Critique of the Gotha Programme and the Communist Manifesto by Marx and various speeches and pamphlets of Lenin's. The comments by Lenin are generally well-known, as are those of Marx. The omission has been largely to allow ease of reading.

http://www.af-north.org/
A Contribution to the Critique of Marx, John Crump.

What do we say about Lenin? We see him now as a bourgeois revolutionary who expressed his bourgeois aspirations by using communist terminology. This is not to say that Lenin represented the interests of the existing bourgeoisie in Russia in 1917; nor are we focusing attention on Lenin's own personal bourgeois social background. Although we mean when call Lenin 'a bourgeois revolutionary' is that he and the

Bolsheviks were instrumental in building up capitalism in Russia: the capitalist revolution of 1917 (which included the October seizure of power as one of its episodes).

Naturally, Lenin thought himself as a communist, and is no reason to doubt that he was put the sincere when he said so. Yet is easy enough for communists to point out numerous ways in which his practice and the theory from which it was derived fell far short of Communism. His concept the role working class was to play (or, more to point, was not to play) in the revolution and his Jacobin ideas on dictatorship are just two of the more obvious as deficiencies when we measure him against communist standards. As is equally well known much of what he had to say about socialism/Communism also indicates a peculiarly warped concept of the new society. The famous formulation of socialism in The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It, written in September 1917 is that 'socialism is nearly state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people'-and explicit statement that his image of socialism was a fundamentally state-capitalist one. Then there was the phoney distinction made between socialism and Communism in State and Revolution, which served to give the illusion that this arbitrarily labelled socialism was within striking distance the Bolsheviks in 1917, even if Communism was not. Coupled with this went the often expressed assertion that 'there is... absolutely no contradiction in principle between Soviet (that is, Socialist) democracy and exercise and dictatorial powers by individuals'-unashamed defences of the continuing oppression of the working class.

Of course this is all becoming rather old hat. But it is on this sort of evidence that our rejection of Leninism rests, and it is by applying to Russian reality standards which can be obtained from Marx's works (or simply by thinking about for yourself) that we have been able to show the Russian social system to the capitalist, and the Leninist ideology which masks and justifies it to be an essentially bourgeois body of thought. It is a simple matter to put side-by-side with certain quotations from Lenin's writings and speeches an equal number of totally contradictory ones lifted from Marx and Engel's texts. For example, as random selection:

'... The working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness' (What Is To Be Done, Lenin)

'... Been emancipation of the workers must be act of the working class himself.' (quoted by Engels in the Preface to the 1890 German edition of the Communist Manifesto)

' If socialism can only be realised when the intellectual development of all people permits it, then we shall not see socialism for at least 500 years...' (Lenin speaking on 21st November 1917 as recorded in Ten Days That Shook The World )

' Marx... entirely trusted to the intellectual development of the working class, which was sure to result from combined action and mutual discussion'(Engels Preface to the 1888 edition of the Communist Manifesto)

'We must raise the question of piece-work and apply it in practice;... we must make wages correspond to the total amount turned out, or to the amount of work done...'(The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government)

' Let us now consider a little more closely the characteristic peculiarities of piece-wages. The quality of labour is here controlled by the work itself, which must be of average perfection in the piece price is to be paid in full. Piece-wages become, from this point of view, the most fruitful source of reductions of wages and capitalist cheating' (Capital, Vol 1, Karl Marx, page 553)

It is the sort of passages which have led us to say of Leninism and Marxism are qualitatively different, that they expressed the interests of totally different revolutionary processes.

All of this appears to be completely cut and dried, yet what has been gradually been occurring to me is that there is a real danger of one-sidedness in the way in which we go about assessing Leninism and Marxism. In other words, we have to be very careful not to contrast Leninism only with what is best in Marxism. We have to be very careful to compare Leninism with the whole of Marxism, and not with some carefully selected and refined Marxism which only represents one side of Marx's thought and activity. I would of course agree that there is an entire area of Marx's writings which amounts to an often brilliant and penetrating exposition of communism. If we take the communist doctrine expressed in this section of his writings, and apply it to Lenin's ideas, true enough we can show (as we did above) the bourgeois revolutionary nature of Leninism. But, on the other hand, what happens, if we take that same communist doctrine and apply it to the rest of Marx's own writings, and to his overall activity as a revolutionary? How does Marx himself begin to show up? Since I don't want to mince my words, I'll say frankly that Marx then starts to look like a bourgeois revolutionary himself. More specifically, he and Engels can then be identified as the theoretical leaders of the bourgeois revolutionary movement (social democracy) which culminated in the German revolution of 1918.

Now to say this is not to retract what I said above - that there is an "entire area of Marx's writings which amounts to an often brilliant and penetrating exposition of communism"[2]. Nor is it to deny that Marx's contributions to socialist theory in this area of his writings are enormously valuable and that we can still learn a great deal from them even today. What it is to say, though, is that the communist ideology which Marx developed here was a socialist theory expressing an entirely different (bourgeois) political practice To put it another way, the communist ideology which Marx elaborated here was precisely what he himself meant by the term 'ideology' a set of ideas which (even when intrinsically correct) mask rather than reveal the true nature of the problem.

The particular problem which several generations of European radicals were wrestling with throughout the long years of Marx and Engels' political activity was the problem (or, rather, the series of problems) of bourgeois revolution. This was why there was nothing contradictory in the fact that the movement into which most of them were eventually to become organized (the Second International) should have culminated in a wave of capitalist revolutions which swept across Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the First World War. This bourgeois revolution expressed itself in a variety of guises - demands for German unity, Polish independence, the overthrow of tsarist autocracy in Russia, etc. - and one of the theoretical forms it took was 'socialism' or 'Marxism' To the extent that this 'socialist' doctrine was theoretically correct (i.e. was genuinely socialist) it was little more than a disembodied theory, having no real point of contact with the problems of the day. Ultimately, this was precisely what some of the social democrats came to say about it. On the other hand, to the extent that this doctrine did relate to the problems inherent in bourgeois revolution (the pressing problems of Marx and Engels' day), it was capitalist. Needless to say, it was just this state-capitalist area of Marxism which was eagerly taken up by social democrats and (later) Bolsheviks alike, while in their hands the communist sector of Marx's thought was either ignored or else ritualised into harmless scripture.

The communist element within Marxism could not have been anything other than a disembodied theory at the time it was put forward because, in the conditions of the nineteenth century, communist revolution was simply impossible Just how near or far the communist revolution is from us today is not something which I will go into here, but at least we can say that for Europe and the other advanced, imdustrialised parts of the world the era of bourgeois revolutions is well and truly finished. Even if the, prospects for a communist revolution remain fairly bleak, at least we now have the opportunity (which Marx and Engels never had) to engage in the work of constructing a theory of communism with minds which are relatively uncluttered with the baggage which belongs to the bourgeois revolution. As we set about constructing

this theory of communism, many of the foundation stones from which to build it can be cut from the rich communist vein which runs through Marx's writings. If we want to build soundly, however, we need to be perfectly clear in our minds about those other sections of Marx's works which are fit only for the state-capitalist slagheap. Above all we need to free ourselves from the sort of mystifying generalisation which declares that "all attempts to deny or 'transcend' Marxism lead logically to counter-revolution"[]. (The quote comes from Revolutionary Perspectives No 1, this magazine was the forerunner of the present day Communist Workers Organisation) The only worthwhile comment is to enquire which particular 'Marxism' it is that those who come out with this sort of remark have in mind; the 'Marxism' which stood for 'Abolition of the wages system!' or the 'Marxism' which declared itself for the 'gallant Turks'? The 'Marxism' which maintained that the 'complete domination of the alienated thing over man is fully manifested in money', or the 'Marxism' which wanted 'Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly'?

This pamphlet is not intended as a systematic explanation of a new way of looking at Marx. A hefty tome would be required for that. All I want to do in the remaining sections is to put a little flesh on the skeleton of the case which I have argued so far.

It is impossible to unravel contradictions which exist within Marx's theory and practice unless one understands his morbid horror of utopianism. One of Marx's best point was his vision of communist society, and the passion with which he clung to it throughout most of his adult life. In place of a society based on private property, where 'my work is alienation of my life, because I work in order to live, to furnish myself with the means of living', Marx's image of a new society where 'my work would be free expression of my, and therefore a free enjoyment of my life' has won for his early texts their current popularity. But the achievement of such a society was not (even distantly) on the horizon at the time that Marx was writing such texts. Consummate remaining just as much a utopia when Marx wrote about it as it did in the hands of (say) Owen. No doubt is expecting too much of Marx, but what was required was a cool understanding that the struggles which were in process in his day were not (even remotely) the struggle for the society that he was dreaming of. Even the struggles of the working class of his day, however heroic they might have been, could not be artificially drafted into the service of communism.

Of course, Marx was only made of flesh and blood and the urge to the active was a strong one for him and Engels. But, if they chose to the active, it was their duty as communists to make absolutely at the difference between, on the one hand, the bourgeois-revolutionary and reformist working class activity in which they were engaged (there was no other activity worth talking of for them to engage in), and on the other hand, the communism to which they were committed in their theory. To have failed to make this difference clear would have resulted in socialism being fatally confused with bourgeois revolution and working class reform of capitalism. As everyone knows, this is just what happened. And it happened thanks, at least in part, to Marx and Engels.

I want to try to avoid being misunderstood here. There is a passage in Engels' Marx and the Neue Rheinische Zeitung where he write: "If we did not desire that, if we did not desire to take up the movement from its already existing, most advanced, actually proletarian side and push it further, then nothing remained for us to do but to preach communism in a little provincial sheet and to found a tiny sect instead of a great party in action. But we had already been spoilt for the role of preachers in the wilderness; we had studied the utopians too well for that. We had not drafted our programme for that."[]) It is worth mentioning, just as an aside, that the phrase "take up the movement from its already existing, most advanced, actually proletarian side"[] is little more than bluster. There was no real proletarian class in Germany at the time Engels was writing about, and "most advanced"[] is a purely relative expression. One could substitute "hopelessly backward"[] without doing any great damage to the meaning of this passage. Apart from this aside, however, I am not arguing that Marx and Engels should have "preach(ed) communism in a little provincial al sect and (ought) to (have) found(ed) a tiny sect'"[]. It is true that, if

they had done so, it would at least have been striking a blow (however small and insignificant) for communism rather than against it, since less confusion would have been caused. But doubtless there were good reasons - in the sense of applying the materialist conception of history to the conditions in existence at that time for their encouraging and participating in bourgeois revolutionary movements in 1848 and at later dates too. To put it another way, there were doubtlessly good reasons for their behaving as capitalist revolutionaries even while they remained communists on the theoretical plane. To have consistently applied the materialist conception of history in this cold, unemotional way, however, would have required a superhuman degree of mental toughness. Cold and unemotional though Marx and Engels might have been on some occasions, there as a healthy slice of romanticism in their characters too. Since they were men and not angels, there is nothing surprising in the fact that they should have sought some escape from the tension that was set up between their theoretical commitment to communism and their actually engaging in bourgeois revolution. This escape was nothing less than kidding themselves (and most of the rest of the world too) that the bourgeois revolution in which they engaged was itself communist - or that at least it included a (non-existent) communist potential. Whatever the personal relief that this escape from reality gave to Marx and Engels, it did incalculable damage to the development of a correct theory of communism.

Perhaps who has ever read Marx with a critical communist consciousness could deny that the criticism which we have made of him here applies to his early writings. The very idea that "the German proletariat" (what proletariat?) stood in an excellent situation.., for socialism in 1844 is too preposterous to waste any time on. Precisely the same goes for the notion expressed in the Communist Manifesto that the "Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution...and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will, be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution." Interestingly enough, when Engel's wrote many years Liter that "Never: has a factual programme justified itself as well as..." the one put forward in the Manifesto, he quoted the section containing the above passage. Wisely, however, he cut his quotation short in mid-paragraph --before it came to the forecast of a proletarian revolution in Germany.

Obviously this sort of romantic nonsense looks ridiculous in retrospect. Yet in itself it was not particularly damaging to communism. If this were all that was wrong with the position which Marx and Engels adopted vis-a -vis the revolution of 1848, it would be quite reasonable to say that they were guilty of nothing more than. their enthusiasm for socialism getting the better of them. They imagined socialism to be a great deal nearer than it eventually turned out to be, and hence were mistaken only in terms of the time-scale that was likely to apply to the social changes which they were predicting. Unfortunately, however, there is more to it than this. In the Communist Manifesto and elsewhere we find a mixture of starry-eyed romanticism and hard-headed realism that was to prove fatal.

If Marx had simply projected an image of communist society in the Manifesto and suggested that this would be the more or less rapid outcome of the revolution which he saw coming, this in itself would not have, done too much harm. Marx was not too much of a realist for this however:-. Instead of an out-and-out utopian (but not particularly harmful) projection of socialism, what we get is a semi-realistic recipe for state capitalism which was fraught with danger because its relation (or non-relation) to socialism was lest unclear. Firstly, the proletariat was to take power. In the conditions of the time this was no more realistic than suggesting that the moon would drop out of the sky, but at least as an abstract and - as it were - a historical statement of communist principle, this was correct. Having taken power, though, the proletariat was to exercise its rule within a continuing capitalist society. In other words, the proletariat, as a unified class, was to be the political master of a system which economically continued to exploit it. What can be made of this? As far as Marx's understanding that in the middle of the nineteenth century an immediate advance to communism was impossible, is concerned, the position he took up was again realistic and correct. But to imagine that within the economic system of capitalism, the proletariat could maintain its undivided unity and hence its political rule, so that a new ruling minority class would not

appear, (nor the politically dispossessed bourgeoisie regain control of the state) -was utterly wishful thinking. Lastly, and for the same reason3 the idea that this (supposedly proletarian administered) capitalism could peacefully and gradually transform itself into communism was just as mistaken (and as dangerous).

Anyone who notices a similarity between the programme we have criticised here and the policy which Lenin and the Bolsheviks subjectively thought they, were pursuing from 1917 onwards is, of course perfectly right. True, there were differences between Bolshevik policy and the programme outlined in the Communist Manifesto. For Marx it was the working class as a whole which was the revolutionary actor: for Lenin the party. One can criticise Leninism on these grounds as a throwback to Jacobinism, as Rosa Luxemburg did. But such a criticism is, in the end, more or less peripheral. The whole notion of a proletarian administered form of capitalism, which was common to Marx in the Communist Manifesto and to Lenin in l9l7, was disastrously wrong. Lenin's concept of the role of the revolutionary vanguard might well be an additional error on top of this, but the communist critique of Leninism does not center on this additional mistake.

Even if some people can accept this criticism of the early Marx up to and including the Communist Manifesto, they will probably tell us that Marx in his maturity is a different kettle of fish. I do not agree with this and I think it is possible to prove it wrong. It is, for example, no defence of the mature Marx to refer to his and Engels' joint preface to the German edition of the Manifesto of 1872, where it was stated that "no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section II." Anyone who reads that preface carefully can see that what Marx and Engels were talking about was a change in the details of the policy they advocated, emphatically not a change in the principle on which that policy rested ("...the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever.") Unfortunately I do not have the time or the materials to hand to trace the state-capitalist thread right the way through Marx's literary output in the years following 1848. However, as an illustration that state-capitalism was still being advocated by Marx in his maturity - and, what is more, was being even more explicitly (and erroneously) identified with socialism than in the Manifesto we can refer to the Critique Of The Gotha Programme of 1875. The Critique is worth taking up because, as with the Communist Manifesto, it also shows the theoretical continuity which exists between Marx and Lenin, as well as the discontinuity which exists between them.

Of course, just as with the Manifesto and Marx's earlier texts, the Critique of the Gotha Programme contains plenty of good points. 'Good points' here means valid statements of communist principle. As before I am not disputing Marx's commitment to communism as a theory in the Critique, and this commitment to communist theory is just what provides the theoretical discontinuity which exists between Marx and Lenin. One searches in vain in Lenin's writings for an exposition of socialism which can even begin to be compared to any of the many excellent explanations of socialism which occur within Marx's works. Lenin never properly grasped what socialism was all about and normally seems to have identified it with 'proletarian' (i.e. vanguard party, in his case) administered state-capitalism. Not so Marx. Marx knew exactly what socialism was. But in his concern to convince himself and the world in general that the capitalist revolutionary activity he was engaged in had something to do with socialism, he ended up presenting a proletarian-administered state-capitalist image of socialism alongside the correct image of socialism which is also to be found in his writings. It is this proletarian-administered state-capitalist image of socialism found in Marx as well as Lenin's texts which provides the theoretical continuity which exists between them, and it was this parallel existence of two distinct images of socialism within Marx's thought which also gave rise to the formulae of the "first phase of communist society" and the higher phase of communist society" which are found in the Critique Of The Gotha Programme.

Let us analyse these two "phases of communist society". The so-called "higher phase of communist society" corresponds, in fact, to communism. At first glance, so too does the "first phase of communist society". The state has disappeared, the means of production have been socialised, "producers do not exchange their products" any longer we are told. Formally, at any rate, the "first phase of communist society" rests on these corner-stones of communism. Marx admits that the "first phase" suffers from "defects", that it is still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society" but 'such admissions never shake his conviction that it is still communist. What is important in Marx's description of the "first phase of communist society", however, is not so much what he says about it as what is left unsaid. What we have to do is to think out the unspoken implications behind what Marx tells us about his so-called "first phase".

"...the social working day consists (we are told) of the sum of the individual labour hours; the individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social labour day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour from the common fund), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour, The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another." (Critique of the Gotha Programme, Karl Marx)

Formally, the means of production are owned communally. But, as far as the individual is concerned, without working he cannot consume. In order to live he has to supply his labour power in exchange for the certificate which enables him to eat. He is, in other words, nothing but a wage labourer (a certificate labourer if you like) and will probably need quite a bit of convincing that his condition is basically any different to his propertyless status under capitalism.

"Producers do not exchange their products", Marx tells us, but he admits that "the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities". Equivalent amounts of labour are still in fact exchanged, only in this case it is certificates which are exchanged with products. True enough, these certificates are not money since they are not intended to circulate -and exchange is supposed to be confined to relationships between the communally owned warehouses (or whatever one calls them) and the individual. Yet, even if we assume this to be so, this would still not prevent Marx's "first phase of communist society" from being a form of capitalism. The fact is, though, that even these restrictions on the process of exchange could in reality be nothing more than pious hopes. Exchange between individuals would still be bound to occur and, whatever the intention behind the labour certificates, they would be bound to circulate too, The only way to prevent this, or at least to drive it underground, would be to devise some strict form of policing system for suppressing exchange between individuals.

This last point brings us on to the question of the state. Marx's "first phase of communist society" would inevitably be a society well supplied with social tensions. ' As we have seen, certificate labourers (whatever the mythology employed to obscure this state of affairs) would in fact stand before the means of production as a propertyless certificate earners forced to 'sell' their labour power. The means of production would therefore confront them as an alien force, from which they were divorced, but to which they had to submit. As far as personal consumption was concerned, this would be as rigidly controlled as it is within existing forms of capitalism. In addition, the only way to restrict exchange between individuals would be to suppress it forcibly. To keep the tensions engendered by such a society under control, some form of policing authority employing force where necessary and defending what were in fact property rights would be required. One might of course suggest that no special armed body of men and women would be needed to do this job - that all would participate in the business of policing themselves. Difficult though it might be to imagine this working in practice, there would be nothing to recommend it even if we grant it as a possibility. It would be no more preferable to have certificate labourers policing themselves than it would to have them policed by a special social group. Indeed, one could say that it would be even

less preferable, since the chances of workers (sorry - certificate labourers!) fighting back would be reduced.

No matter how insistently Marx might have applied the label "first phase of communist society" to this society which he described in the Critique Of The Gotha Programme, as soon as we examine it in any sort of depth we can see that it is a form of capitalism. Marx's presentation of communism is perfectly correct as long as he deals with it in an abstract, theoretical fashion - or as long as he relegates it to the distant future (the "higher phase of communist society"). But as soon as he tries to relate his presentation of communism to the struggle he was actually engaged in, or to what was materially possible in the latter half of the nineteenth century, he inevitably starts to reduce this 'communism' to the level of capitalism.

Within a 'proletarian'-administered state-capitalist image of socialism of his own, Lenin was the last person likely to notice any inconsistencies in Marx's description of the "first phase of communist society". On the contrary, when Lenin wrote his commentary on the Critique Of The Gotha Programme in State And Revolution he did so entirely uncritically. But the remarkable thing about this section of State And Revolution is that, while Lenin accepted the basic inconsistencies incorporated in Marx's treatment of the "first phase of communist society", having once accepted these inconsistencies he consistently thought them through to their conclusion in a way which Marx himself had never done. Lenin thus realised what we ourselves have pointed out above - that the description of the "first phase of communist society" given by Marx in the Critique Of The Gotha Programme means inevitably the "strictest control by society and by the state over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption". Lenin is quite right to point out that, once Marx's basic inconsistencies that 'bourgeois rights will continue to exist within communism is accepted, it consistently "follows that under communism there remains for a time not only the bourgeois right, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie!"

Naturally, anyone who has a reasonable grounding in Marx s writings can ridicule what Lenin wrote here. It is after all quite possible to sift out any number of bald statements that socialism and the state are incompatible, that there will be no state under socialism, from Marx and Engels' texts. It is, however, a singularly pointless exercise to do so. Statements that the state is an organ of class society, that there can be no state in the classless society of socialism and so on may abound in Marx and Engels' works but they belong to those sections of their writings where they were dealing with more or less abstract socialist theory. Whenever Marx and Engels got down to suggesting concrete solutions to the problems of the capitalist revolution they were involved in, it was an entirely different story. Socialist terminology was still employed by them, even on these occasions, but the socialist content of their ideas was then eclipsed by state capitalism in their desire to be 'realistic' or 'scientific'. This is what provides the theoretical continuity between Marx and Lenin. When we compare the Critique of the Gotha Programme with State and Revolution, the most we can accuse Lenin of is having said openly and honestly what Marx himself had merely implied.

By way of summing up, I would like to restate what I have already said, in a slightly different way. The dilemma which Marx found himself in was very much the same as that which still confronts communists today. Marx yearned for communism at a time when only capitalist struggles offered any chances of success in the reasonably near future. Like most present-day communists he was frustrated by inactivity too. The third source of tension was that he wanted to have done with utopianism and to be 'scientific'. We can thus represent Marx's dilemma graphically by a diagram which shows Marx occupying the middle ground between "communism", "activity" and "science" (we could just as well call this last factor "materialism" or "anti-utopianism").

COMMUNISM

MARX

ACTIVITY SCIENCE/materialism/anti-utopianism

Marx wanted to close the three sides of this triangle but, in the conditions of his day, it was impossible do this. Try as one might, only one side of the triangle could be closed. One could try to be an active communist i.e.:

COMMUNISM

ACTIVITY SCIENCE/materialism/anti-utopianism

but this left one open to the charge of being utopian, since one's actvity' was like, thrashing about in a vacuum. One could be a scientific communist i.e.:-

COMMUNISM

ACTIVITY 'SCIENCE'

but, since science demanded that one recognise that communism offered no prospects of anything but the very longest""term success, one was bound to be accused ed of inactivity, or at least of standing aside from the mass struggles that were in process. Finally, one could be active and "materialist" (or in the sense of engaging in what Engels called "the already existing" movement) i.e.:

COMMUNISM

ACTIVITY 'SCIENCE'

but - as we have seen - this could only put one's commitment to communism at risk.

The answer to this riddle is of course that -only the working class as a whole, rather than individual revolutionaries can bridge the three sides' of this triangle. Until workers do close this triangle, all we more or less isolated revolutionaries are stuck with this dilemma. What makes it particularly painful is precisely that there is no solution at the level of the isolated individual revolutionary (or revolutionary group However distasteful it might be, in the absence of communist consciousness among the mass of the working class, the individual revolutionary has to give up something. The only choice we have is to decide which one of the three factors we have represented in our diagram ("communism", "activity" or "science "materialism"/"anti-utopianism) we choose to abandon. Without becoming sentimental, this is the tragedy of anyone who desires to be a revolutionary socialist under present conditions - and Marx demonstrates that tragedy particularly well.

John Crump, August 27, 1975

A COMMENT ON JOHN CRUMP'S "A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF MARX"

Joint Social Revolution/Solidarity pamphlet.

JOHN CRUMP states that "for Europe and other truly industrialised parts of the world the era of bourgeois revolutions is well and truly finished". Indeed I would go further and say that today capitalism is the dominant world system (east and west) and the working class a truly international class. The state capitalist reforms of Marx's 'Communist Manifesto' that provided the link with Lenin's bolshevist policies are all but complete, with the traditional left arguing over the remaining details. And yet John maintains

that socialists today face the same dilemma as they did in Marx's day, that of choosing between sectarian socialist politics and involvement in bourgeois reform politics. This just doesn't square.

Socialists pursue their own individual and class interests (in a slightly more conscious manner than most workers). To the extent that socialism was not immediately realizable in Marx's day, socialists HAD to pursue those interests as best they could within the framework of the emerging capitalist society. This meant helping in the organisation of their fellow workers as an independent class and pursuing reforms aimed at strengthening the class. It inevitably also meant fighting alongside the bourgeois against feudal and aristocratic institutions.

Is the situation the same today? YES, in so far as socialists are still pursuing the same interests. But today the pursuit of those interests leads much more closely to socialism. The old institutions of the working class (social-democratic parties, trade unions and co-operatives) most useful in the struggle for basic reforms, are now integrated into capitalist administration. Workers are obliged to go beyond, and even outside and against these institutions. The basic reforms of the past are now taken for granted, workers aspirations increasingly become more difficult for capitalism to satisfy. In addition the technical capacity of the world and the potential for abundance and elimination of toil become more clearly contrasted to capitalisms restrictions and waste.

There is no automatic link between the every day class struggle, which is marked by numerous periods of reaction, and the socialist objective, but a link can l)e made with the most advanced elements of struggle, something which Marx despite the advanced level of his theory could not do. Creating this 'link' is undoubtedly a problem but we are not forced into making the pessimistic choices offered us by John Crump.

Socialists who are 'guided' by some 'historical mission' rather than their own individual and class interests in the present situation, have fallen prey to the very mystification they have been aiming to overcome, they have turned socialism into a religion (although they may have exorcised Marx!)

Mike Ballard (Published in Social Revolution No. 6)